



## RESEARCH NOTE

# Which Employees are Most Motivated to Share Knowledge – the Role of Age-Based Differentiation in Knowledge-Sharing Motivation

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### ABSTRACT

The problem of age diversity in the workplace is becoming increasingly important, especially because of the ageing workforce. Knowledge-sharing should therefore be encouraged among employees of different ages. The topic of this research is the role of age-based differentiation or intergenerational differentiation in motivation to share knowledge. Participating in this study were 202 employees of six Slovenian companies. The participants filled out the *Knowledge-sharing Motivation Measure*, translated into Slovenian for the purposes of this study, and *The Intergenerational Differentiation in the Workplace Measure*. Our objective was to find out how three different age groups differ in the subjective perceptions of knowledge-sharing motivation and how the perception of intergenerational differentiation is correlated with knowledge sharing motivation. The results show that the youngest age group of employees feels the most discriminated against due to their age, but is also the most motivated to share knowledge when compared to the other two age groups. The correlation between the two measured constructs is not significant. The main findings are that it is important to acknowledge the younger

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age group of employees, since it seems to be the most vulnerable to intergenerational differentiation. Also, it is important to encourage older workers to share their valuable knowledge.

### KEYWORDS

intergenerational relationships, diversity in the workplace, knowledge, employees, older workers

## Introduction

The knowledge of workers of all ages is important and should be shared and preserved. If this does not happen, knowledge disappears, and the knowledge level of an organisation will become unbalanced (Floor, 2007). In every organisation, there are several types of knowledge in connection with different aspects of the work process. Polanyi's taxonomy of knowledge (1966) is the most well-known theory and it classifies knowledge into tacit and explicit knowledge. An organisation's knowledge depends on the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge during the processes of socialisation, internalisation and externalisation. Explicit knowledge is knowledge that can be coded and transferred through documentation (Nonaka, 1994), and it can be recorded, for instance in a manual, description or instructions (Reychaw & Weisberg, 2009).

Tacit knowledge exists within an individual's experiences and judgements, and as such is not easily coded. It exists in an individual's mind and is deeply imbedded in personal actions, which are not easily transferrable (Nonaka, 1994). Practical knowledge does not convey information clearly and is difficult to be put into words (Zupančič, 2009). It is an example of tacit knowledge, and can represent a source of permanent competitive advantage. Since it cannot easily be coded, it is impossible for a competitive company to obtain such tacit knowledge, but at the same time, it is also transferred within an organization with greater difficulty due to this feature (Rannuci & Souder, 2015).

Knowledge-sharing among employees as a form of cooperation is important in creating the competitive advantages of an organisation (Jiacheng, Lu & Francesco, 2010a). It encompasses behaviour, which facilitates the sharing of knowledge an individual has acquired or established within an organisation (Hsu, 2006). Cummings (2004) defines knowledge-sharing as receiving knowledge through information, procedures, and feedback. Nine knowledge-sharing mechanisms are defined at the intra-organisational level (Mahmood, Qureshi & Evans, 2015). They include both formal and informal levels: documentation, education and training, reading standard operating procedures, recognition of work, routine and non-routine meetings, seminars and conferences, show and tell, staff updates and voluntary mentoring.

In knowledge management discussions, passing on knowledge from generation to generation is gaining significance. This is evident from the growing amount of research that has discussed the factors influencing knowledge-sharing (Casimir, Lee & Loon, 2012; Hsu, 2006). Several researchers have examined the issues of the generation

gap and intergenerational learning (Floor, 2007; Piktialis & Greenes, 2008). The most common changes at work in present-day and future society are the ageing workforce, and the pressure exerted on organisations to take advantage of existing knowledge by applying efficient knowledge management (Arnold et al., 2005). These issues are thus gaining more significance in work and organisational psychology. No research has been found in literature that might focus on intergenerational and age differences in connection with knowledge-sharing from the subjective point of view of an individual.

### **Model of Knowledge-Sharing Motivations**

Jiacheng et al. (2010a) formed an individual cognitive model of knowledge-sharing motivation. The model depicts differential cognitive processes based on an individual's motivation towards knowledge-sharing. These processes show how an individual's intrinsic motivation derived from social and personal norms, and extrinsic motivation derived from reward and punishment, make concerted efforts to shape the ultimate intention of knowledge-sharing. External influences, such as social norms, are first projected to one's interior interface. They then undergo the influence of internal cognitive mechanisms before being displayed as external behaviour. The insight into an individual's cognitive mechanism towards knowledge-sharing motivation can reveal the principle of individual perceptions towards knowledge-sharing (Jiacheng et al., 2010a). The cognitive knowledge-sharing model described below was the foundation for the empirical part of this research. The model's theory includes individual cognitive mechanisms of knowledge-sharing motivation, which makes it suitable for research of subjective willingness to share knowledge.

Jiacheng et al. (2010a) suggested a cognitive model that depicts an individual's motivation acting upon various cognitive processes. The outcome of these processes is the ultimate intention to share knowledge. The model connects the functional mechanisms of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The researcher's intention was to seek predictive indicators on the intention to share knowledge, and it refers to the degree, to which people are willing to make efforts to engage in knowledge-sharing (Ajzen, 1991). The functional mechanism of knowledge-sharing can be integrated into four psychological processes:

- internalisation: these motivation mechanisms are from within an individual. People value knowledge-sharing behaviour and appreciate the values of knowledge-sharing if it accords with their own values. An individual can realise their own self-worth when they believe their knowledge-sharing would improve team work processes and increase work efficiency (Bock, Lee, & Zmud, 2005);
- identification means the degree, to which people can envision the maintenance of satisfying and interpersonal relationships with those who are involved in knowledge reception (Jiacheng et al., 2010a);
- conformity occurs when an individual accepts knowledge-sharing owing to the blind reliance on other people's attitudes. Since conformity is always linked to social norms, it was defined in the research as the degree, to which one believes that others expect one to share knowledge (Jiacheng, Lu & Francesco, 2010b);

– compliance: An individual's behavioural decision is influenced by others so that they adopt others' opinions or decisions instead of their own (e.g. in a situation where an individual's knowledge-sharing attitude is only an echo of the majority's opinions).

Jiacheng et al. (2010b) define social (or subjective) norms as an individual's perception pertaining to important expectations of others regarding their knowledge-sharing (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and they operate through an individual's beliefs as to whether others who are of importance to them think they should share knowledge. The concept of social norms acts as an individual's interior interface reflecting external influences. In contrast to personal norms, social norms are a source of conformity and compliance. The reward incentive in compliance is the likelihood that people believe they can obtain rewards for their knowledge-sharing. The intention to share knowledge cannot be forced simply by tangible and explicit punitive measures mainly referred to as latent punishment. It can be defined as the degree, to which people believe they can be excluded from or disapproved of by a team for not sharing their knowledge. Knowledge-sharing is a self-determined activity, and it cannot be mandated (Brock et al., 2005). In practice, it is hard to detect the extent, to which employees engage in knowledge-sharing, so it is impossible for the management to quantify the tangible incentive to control employees' knowledge-sharing. Individuals thus perceive the controlling aspect of rewards in knowledge-sharing only to a low extent. Some case studies of knowledge-sharing practices indicate that appropriate rewards have a symbolic function and can represent reputation and recognition, which leads to more active knowledge-sharing (Hsu, 2006; Taylor, 2006). When receiving an appropriate reward for their knowledge-sharing, employees perceive organizational recognition, which strengthens their perceived competence.

## Management of Older Workforce

Senior employees can be reticent in sharing their knowledge with younger employees for fear of becoming redundant (Floor, 2007). Younger employees need new knowledge upon starting at a new workplace as they do not have much experience. They gain the largest amount of knowledge and know-how from experienced senior employees. Coaching is a very appropriate leadership style for senior employees. When the manager makes time for them and shows them that the organisation appreciates them, this consequently increases their willingness to share knowledge (Floor, 2007). Career planning is often done only with younger employees, but this can also be an important tool to motivate senior employees. Senior employees want to feel useful in their workplace, which can be achieved when they share their active knowledge and experience with younger employees. Managers do not often give senior employees the opportunity to engage in further training since they do not consider it beneficial for the organisation. Other factors that are significant for senior employees are trust, respect, acknowledgment, and a sense of security (Floor, 2007). Trust is an important factor in knowledge-sharing. It is important that senior employees feel secure in their work environment and that they do not have the feeling they will become superfluous for the managers and the organisation when

they share their knowledge. Flexible working hours and the feeling their knowledge is appreciated are also very valuable to the (Taylor & Walker, 1998).

Finkelstein, Ryan, and King (2013) explored stereotypes and meta-stereotypes in different age groups and found that the middle-aged group is the least exposed to age differentiation and is treated as the normative group of the workforce. In this research, the group of younger workers included employees aged 18–35 and the group of senior workers included workers older than 55. The research aims to answer the question whether individual age groups differ in their motivation to share knowledge.

### **The Role of Older Workforce in Knowledge Sharing**

There is a strong positive correlation between age and level of knowledge. Tacit knowledge needs to be transferred from an older employee to a younger one, since older employees have built up a lot of experience and organizational know-how (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). On the other hand, younger employees also possess a lot of knowledge, be it on the advancing information technology, new work approaches or the newest theories and research. L. Finkelstein et al. (2013) state that stereotypical beliefs about different age groups may have serious consequences for knowledge-sharing as they restrict communication between younger and older employees, as well as creativity, due to the lack of psychological security. Managers should be aware of such stereotypes and should aim to connect different generations for successful knowledge-sharing in an organisation. Remery, Henkens, Schippers and Ekamper (2001) have found that managers associate older employees with higher costs, but also with greater experience and useful, practical knowledge. Zupančič (2009) states that middle-aged employees may later become experts in their fields, which is associated with a high level of efficiency at problem solving. This depends on practical or tacit knowledge. Intergenerational learning and the significance of knowledge transfer between generations have already been researched.

Managers should form teams or workgroups that consist of both older and younger employees. This way, cooperation between younger and older employees is encouraged as they can inspire each other and learn from each other by sharing their knowledge. Mentorship may also develop, in which know-how is transferred and shared. Managers should encourage intergenerational knowledge transfer. It is important to build an environment, in which older employees feel secure and do not fear they will become redundant. Managers must be aware of the fact that older employees have different needs and therefore maintain a life-phase oriented HR development strategy (Floor, 2007).

### **The Research Subject**

This research aims to study the correlation between intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing motivation, that is, the willingness of employees of different age groups to share their knowledge. No studies that would connect the correlation between these two concepts have been conducted so far. Similar studies state that what is

essential for the successful sharing of knowledge and expertise is a trustful environment (e.g. Nottingham, 1998), recognition and respect (e.g. Floor, 2007), and positive relationships (e.g. Reyshav & Weisberg, 2009). Knowledge within an organisation and knowledge sharing are essential for successful cooperation among employees within an organisation and form an organisation's competitive advantage (Floor, 2007; Jiacheng et al., 2010a). Age diversity, and even more so an ageing workforce, is one of the changes that is very much present in modern times (Arnold et al., 2005), which makes this study very topical. Increasing age diversity in modern times is connected to an increased awareness of an age discriminatory climate (Finkelstein et al., 2007).

In order to better understand the potential differences between age groups in a subjective experience of intergenerational differentiation, the following research question was posed: *Does knowledge-sharing motivation differ in individual age groups of employees?* The objective of this research is to determine the potential specific characteristics of individual groups in both measured constructs before a conclusion on differences in the perception of intergenerational differentiation can be made.

The second step was to form a hypothesis: *Individuals will perceive intergenerational differentiation in the workplace more if they are less willing to share their knowledge with others.* The social comparison theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) presupposes that the differences in demographic characteristics of individuals within a group will limit interaction and the sharing of knowledge. If these differences are emphasised or perceived by an individual, they might influence the individual's willingness to share their knowledge. Trust, good relationships, communication, the feeling of belonging and perception may be compromised if individuals feel discriminated against due to their age. In earlier research, these factors have been recognised as significant for a facilitated sharing of knowledge (e.g. Arnett & Wittman, 2014; Cai, Li & Guan, 2016; Lauring & Selmer, 2012). The expectations of age differentiation of employees by members of other age groups may impede knowledge transfer, as well as contribute to decreased performance success and increased anxiety (Finkelstein et al., 2013). Older employees, for example, possess great knowledge and experience, which they have gained through years of work. If they fall victim to age differentiation and discrimination due to their age, they will not have the opportunity to share their knowledge, and their need to belong and be respected by others will not be fulfilled (Braithwaite, 2004; De Guzman, 2014). Individuals that will perceive age differentiation more will likely be less willing to share their knowledge. Considering the results of earlier research, it is expected that this correlation will be the most obvious in the older age group.

## Methodology

### ***Participants and the Procedure***

A total of 202 workers from six Slovenian companies participated in the research. The sample consisted of 73 men (36%) and 129 women (64%). Their average age was 44.6 years ( $SD = 8.8$  years), and the participants were aged from 25 to 64 years old with an average of 20 years of work experience. 18% of them were younger than 35, 61% of them were included in the 35–54 age group and 21% of the participants

were older than 55. Most participants had a professional academic bachelor's degree (39%), nearly a third of them had a master of science or a doctorate degree (30%), and less than a quarter of participants had completed post-secondary or first-cycle higher education (22%).

The participants received the link to the questionnaires via e-mail and were granted full anonymity. The data was collected from April to June 2017.

### **Research Tools**

*Intra-Organizational Knowledge-Sharing Motivations Measure* (Jiacheng et al., 2010b) is a self-assessment questionnaire with 34 items to assess an individual's cognitive mechanisms to share knowledge with the members of the organisation. An individual assesses the items of the questionnaire on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items are combined into eight subsections: internalisation (e.g. My knowledge-sharing would improve team work processes), identification (e.g. My knowledge-sharing would strengthen my ties with existing team members), conformity (e.g. I always accept the majority's opinion on knowledge-sharing), reward incentive (e.g. I will receive monetary rewards in return for my knowledge-sharing), latent punishment (e.g. My private views about knowledge-sharing are different from those I express publicly), subjective norm (e.g. My CEO thinks that I should share my knowledge with other members of the organization), attitude towards knowledge-sharing (e.g. All things considered, my knowledge-sharing with other organizational members is good), and intention to share knowledge (e.g. I intend to share my ideas with team members as much as possible). Besides providing partial results in the subsections, the answers produce an overall result that indicates the overall knowledge-sharing motivation.

*The Intergenerational Differentiation in the Workplace Measure* (Jelenko, 2015) is a self-assessment questionnaire, which includes eight items. Two items comprise each of the four following subsections: management (e.g. My manager micromanages my work due to my age); communication (e.g. I feel that in communication, other employees look down on me and regard me as inferior because of my age); productivity (e.g. Other employees don't appreciate my knowledge and skills due to my age), and cooperation (e.g. In my workplace, I only cooperate with employees of my age). The participants assess the frequency of a behaviour on the following seven-point scale: 0 – never; 1 – almost never; 2 – rarely; 3 – sometimes; 4 – often; 5 – almost always; 6 – always). One of the items is assessed in a reversed order. The higher the total of the items, the more the intergenerational differentiation in the workplace is perceived. The internal reliability of the questionnaire was verified twice before it was used in this research and is adequately high ( $N_1 = 109$ ,  $\alpha_1 = 0.72$ ;  $N_2 = 20$ ,  $\alpha_2 = 0.74$ ) (Jelenko, 2015).

### **Results**

The first step was to calculate the reliability coefficient of the *Intra-Organizational Knowledge-Sharing Motivations Measure*, which was satisfactory ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ). When comparing the reliability of the subsections of the *Questionnaire on knowledge-*



sharing motivation with the reliability of those used by the authors in their research (Jiacheng et al., 2010b), our research tool for the sample proved less reliable (Table 1). The reliability coefficient of the *Intergenerational differentiation in the Workplace Measure* is 0.79, which confirms the findings of the questionnaire's author (Jelenko, 2015).

**Table 1.** Reliability Coefficients for the Subsections of the Questionnaire on Knowledge-Sharing Motivation in the Original Research ( $\alpha_1$ ; Jiacheng et al., 2010a) and in this research ( $\alpha_2$ ).

Subsection	$\alpha_1$	$\alpha_2$
Internalisation	0.83	0.77
Identification	0.88	0.72
Conformity	0.78	0.60
Reward incentive	0.84	0.61
Latent punishment	0.78	0.36
Subjective norm	0.80	0.56
Attitude towards knowledge-sharing	0.84	0.60
Intention to share knowledge	0.89	0.76

Since the questionnaire data in the whole sample and in individual age groups is normally distributed, the ANOVA statistical method was used to determine the differences between age groups. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of the results from the questionnaire on knowledge-sharing motivation per individual age group.

**Table 2.** The Number of Participants in an Individual Age Group (N), Arithmetic Mean of the Answers in the Questionnaire on Knowledge-Sharing Motivation (M), and Standard Deviation (SD)

Age group	N	M	SD
Younger (up to 35 years)	36	120.14	7.15
Middle-aged (35–54 years)	121	114.98	12.34
Senior (over 55 years)	42	112.98	14.14

As is evident from the table with descriptive statistics, certain differences between the groups exist. Detailed analysis showed that the differences are statistically significant ( $F = 3.73$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). When determining differences between individual subsections of the questionnaire and the age groups, the only significant difference was found in the subsection of Identification ( $F = 5.07$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

Individual age groups were compared by using the independent samples *t*-test. The final result of the questionnaire revealed a statistically significant difference ( $t = 3.15$ ;  $df = 101.29$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) in knowledge-sharing motivation between the group of younger employees, and the middle-aged group. A significant difference was revealed in the subsection of the Identification ( $t = 2.91$ ;  $df = 158$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

In order to verify the correlation between the perceived age differentiation and the willingness to share knowledge with others, Spearman's correlation coefficients were calculated for the final results, as well as the results of individual subsections. The perception of intergenerational differentiation and the willingness to share



knowledge are not connected. The other correlations between the subsections are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Subsections and Final Results of the Intra-Organizational Knowledge-Sharing Motivations Measure (KSM) and the Intergenerational Differentiation in the Workplace Measure (IGD)*

	1	2	3	4	IGD	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. IGD Communication													
2. IGD Management	0.46**												
3. IGD Cooperation	0.19**	0.32**											
4. IGD Productivity	0.48**	0.66**	0.30**										
Intergenerational differentiation (total)	0.68**	0.65**	0.71**	0.73**									
5. KSM Internalisation	-0.08	-0.06	-0.04	-0.08	-0.03								
6. KSM Identification	-0.02	-0.08	-0.02	0.09	-0.03	0.49**							
7. KSM Conformity	-0.01	0.10	0.15*	-0.02	0.09	0.05	0.25**						
8. KSM Reward incentive	-0.03	0.15*	0.09	0.11	0.09	0.01	0.28**	0.12*					
9. KSM Latent punishment	0.24**	0.24**	0.14	0.23*	0.22**	-0.17*	-0.02	0.12	0.18*				
10. KSM Subjective norm	-0.17*	-0.02	-0.02	0.04	-0.06	0.34**	0.42**	0.09	0.23**	-0.07			
11. KSM Attitudes towards knowledge-sharing	-0.30**	-0.23**	-0.23**	-0.18**	-0.28**	0.48**	0.49**	0.12	0.14*	-0.13	0.37**		
12. KSM Intention to share knowledge	-0.13*	-0.07	-0.15*	-0.10	-0.14*	0.50**	0.38**	0.13*	-0.03	-0.30**	0.27**	0.58**	
Intra-Organizational Knowledge-Sharing Motivation (total)	-0.12*	0.04	-0.03	0.07	-0.02	0.65**	0.83**	0.42**	0.36**	-0.01	0.61**	0.70**	0.64**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

No significant correlation between intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing motivation was determined; however, certain correlations have surfaced between individual subsections of both questionnaires. There is a moderate correlation between the perception of intergenerational differences and employees' willingness to share their knowledge. Quality communication ( $r = -0.30$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), management ( $r = -0.23$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), cooperation ( $r = -0.23$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and productivity ( $r = -0.28$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) are correlated with increased willingness to share knowledge.

A new calculation of Spearman's correlation coefficient and a verification of the age variable proved the correlation between intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing motivation to be statistically significant ( $r = -0.16$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), but nonetheless low. The increased correlation between the two constructs in the complete sample led to a re-examination of the correlation within individual age groups. The correlation of intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing motivation in the younger group of employees was negative and medium high ( $r = -0.41$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ); in the other two groups, no statistically significant differences were observed.

## Discussion

The objective of this research was to determine whether age groups differ in their knowledge-sharing motivation, and to examine the correlation between intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing motivation. The results of the translated *Intra-Organizational Knowledge-Sharing Motivations Measure* (Jiacheng et al., 2010b) were normally distributed in the sample and this was an adequate reason for a detailed analysis of the results. With the help of *The Intergenerational Differentiation in the Workplace Measure*, it was determined that the results are not distributed equally in the considered sample, and that the reliability of the questionnaire is comparable to the reliability as determined by its author Jelenko (2015).

The analysis showed that statistically, the group of youngest employees differs significantly from the other age groups, specifically the members of this group were more willing to share their knowledge than employees in other groups. Although other differences between the age groups were not significant, it is evident that the older the employees are, the less motivated they are to share their knowledge. As for the group of older employees, this can be explained by applying the findings of Kanfer and Ackerman (2004), who state that senior employees can be reticent in sharing their knowledge with younger employees for fear of becoming redundant. According to L. Finkelstein and colleagues (2013), middle-aged employees might perceive that younger employees are competing for their jobs, which leads to a protective attitude towards their knowledge. Younger employees are most likely to share their knowledge because they need to gain a lot of knowledge, and they expect that by sharing their knowledge, other employees will reciprocate. Social exchange theory posits that relationships between employees are based on the mutual expectation from both parties that voluntary acts will motivate reciprocity, which does generally occur (Blau, 1964). The fact that of all age groups senior employees are the least motivated is significant for work organisations; this is the age group with the largest amount of tacit knowledge, that is, knowledge that is difficult to transfer and write down. The only option for organisations to preserve such knowledge is by sharing this knowledge with younger employees. It is thus of key importance that senior employees are motivated to do so.

No significant correlation between intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing motivation was determined; however, certain correlations have surfaced between individual subsections of both questionnaires. The research shows

that employees who feel that their communication with their co-workers is limited due to their age are less motivated to share their knowledge.

The subsection *conformity* as knowledge-sharing motivation is positively correlated to the subsection *cooperation* from the intergenerational differentiation questionnaire. Both subsections show the employees' need to be accepted by others and the need to belong to a social group; two needs that exist in every social situation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). An individual most likely feels most comfortable in their own social group, in this case their age group, and adopts the group's opinion.

The subsections *reward incentive* as knowledge-sharing motivation and *management* from the intergenerational differentiation questionnaire are also positively correlated, albeit on a low level. The authors of the cognitive model of knowledge-sharing motivation state that the reward incentive is in fact motivation to the employees as they may receive rewards for sharing their knowledge (Jiacheng et al., 2010a); rewards, which function symbolically and may come with recognition and reputation (e.g. Hsu, 2006; Taylor, 2006). When receiving an appropriate reward for sharing their knowledge, employees perceive organizational recognition, which is why individuals who feel the management's pressure in their workplace might be more motivated to share their knowledge provided they receive a reward from the management. Bock et al. (2005) found that the need for a reward might impede knowledge-sharing, and that rewards might have a negative influence on internal motivation or only lead to temporary obedience. This explains the positive correlation in this research, as individuals who perceive age differentiation from their management are more externally motivated to share their knowledge. This means that their motivation is economic and not socio-psychological or psychological (Bock et al., 2005).

The subsection *latent punishment* from the knowledge-sharing motivation questionnaire is positively correlated to three of the four subsections from the intergenerational differentiation questionnaire, specifically the subsections *productivity*, *communication* and *management*. The so-called punishment that is correlated with knowledge sharing mainly refers to latent punishment. It can be defined as the degree, to which people believe they can be excluded from or disapproved of by a team for not sharing their knowledge. This is external motivation, which is contrary to autonomous motivation (Ozlati, 2015), and which represents a significant factor in knowledge-sharing motivation. Individuals who perceive intergenerational differentiation in productivity and communication, as well as from their management, to a large extent will be more easily motivated to share their knowledge through punishment. Punishment or fear of punishment in an organisation cannot be an effective method of behaviour alteration (Arnold et al., 2005). For an individual, this merely means avoiding punishment, thus external motivation, and it cannot provide psychological security. With knowledge-sharing, certain behaviour is encouraged while with punishment, a reduction in unwanted behaviour is sought (Arnold et al., 2005).

Some research (e.g. Braithwaite, 2004; De Guzman, 2014) has presupposed that the perception of intergenerational differentiation represents a negative factor in knowledge-sharing motivation. The results of this research do not confirm

these assumptions due to the many potential variables correlated to knowledge-sharing. Such variables are for example co-workers' support (Soojin et al., 2015), communication (Nonaka, 1994), motivation (Ozlati, 2015) and trust (Arnett & Wittmann, 2014). An important part of willingness to share knowledge is an individual's internal motivation, their values and their subjective norms, which is included in the cognitive model by Jiacheng et al. (2010b). This model was the basis for the questionnaire used in this research. In her master's thesis on knowledge transfer within an organisation, Podobnik (2009) determined by means of group and half-structured interviews that employees consider the management key to knowledge management and transfer, and assign great significance to clear and honest communication. Knowledge-sharing motivation is thus a much more complex concept that can only be explained if the perception of intergenerational differentiation is present.

However, only a few authors so far have discussed in detail the transferring of knowledge between generations (Floor, 2007; Bjursell, 2015; Felicijan, 2015). However, nobody has focused solely on an individual's subjective experience; the focus was on organisational practices of knowledge management. This is why the most significant contribution of this research is the consideration of employees' subjective experiences. For the purposes of this research, a questionnaire based on socio-psychological theories was used, specifically on social influence theory (Kelman, 1958), the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and social comparison theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and the social context of an individual's work environment was taken into account.

To further explore this field, more quality research would need to be conducted to clarify terms such as knowledge-sharing, age differentiation, and age stereotypes. All potential moderator variables in the relationship between intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing should be taken into account, and the most significant ones should be emphasised not just in theory but in practice, including in organisations. The organisational environment would need to focus further on the expectations of younger employees and not underestimate them due to their age. Based on the results, it can be concluded that intergenerational differentiation as perceived by the younger group of employees is negatively correlated with their knowledge-sharing motivation.

## Conclusions

This research established that senior employees are less motivated to share their knowledge than younger employees are. This raises concerns, as many authors (Floor, 2007; Luring & Selmer, 2012) state that senior employees are the ones with the largest amount of tacit knowledge, which must be preserved within an organisation.

According to social influence theory, an individual accepts influence from the environment, they avoid punishments and gain rewards, and they adopt the induced behaviour to create beneficial relationships with others, which results in conformity. A certain behaviour might occur if an individual's values are congruent with the values of the environment. The theory of reasoned action explains the difference between an

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individual's behavioural intention and actual behaviour. There are certain factors, which will prevent an individual from doing something despite wanting to. Social comparison theory posits that we determine our own worth based on how we compare against others. All these theories can be applied to the context of knowledge-sharing and age differentiation. If the external environment supports knowledge-sharing among employees of all ages, and if these employees feel that the incentive is congruent with their values, they will more likely share their knowledge. It will not remain an intention, which would happen if limiting factors, such as punishment, were present. Individuals compare themselves with other employees of all ages; this influences their behaviour towards others, and the motivation to share their knowledge. The differences in demographic characteristics of individuals within a group can impede knowledge-sharing, and if these differences are emphasised or perceived by an individual, this might influence their willingness to share their knowledge. This research aims to emphasise the significance of the social context when studying complex organisational concepts, which include both interpersonal and social interactions.

It should be pointed out that this research had certain limitations and that the conclusions based on the results are also limited. Selective sampling should be taken into account, as this research only included organisations and individuals that were motivated to participate, which is why the sample is not representative of the Slovenian population in its educational structure and gender. The subjectivity of reporting could also be a limiting factor, as objective data about organisational practices for the inclusion of employees of all ages and the encouragement of knowledge-sharing would provide further data about the actual situation in such organisations. The uneven samples of organisations should also be mentioned, as it means there are limitations in the conclusions of statistical analyses, as some of the samples of individual companies do not represent statistically strong groups. Age groups were formed artificially, based on preliminary research, even though age is a continuous variable without clear borders between different age groups. The main limitation of this research was the failure to consider significant factors from the environment and from an individual's point of view, as these can play an important role in the complex relationship between intergenerational differentiation and knowledge-sharing motivation. Some such factors are an individual's characteristics, the characteristics of the organisational climate and culture, communication, and the level of trust in an organisation's work environment.

With age diversity increasing in society, organisations face the challenge of restructuring learning processes. The concept of intergenerational learning includes a reciprocal learning process and knowledge development, as well as a shift from knowledge-sharing to co-creating knowledge, in the efforts to share knowledge. This shift is of key importance when the digital generation enters the labour market. The strategies for sharing knowledge in organisations should be adjusted to the methods and processes that include new generations and encourage the transfer of knowledge. The key features here are communication without age differentiation, trust, and an individual's intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. Nowadays, as many as five generations might work side by side in an organisation, and the co-existence of many generations brings an opportunity for intergenerational interactions and learning.

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